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MOTIVATION RESEARCH AND ADVERTISING READERSHIP

FRANKLIN B. EVANS*

MOTIVATION research investigates the unverbalized levels of human motivation, and the results are often translated into specific recommendations for the advertising campaign planner or copywriter. Although an advertisement's effectiveness cannot be measured in terms of its attention value alone, it is reasonable to assume that, if the appeals suggested by motivation research would increase the sales of the product, they should have a direct relationship to the attention value of advertisements employing them.

This paper reports a pilot study examining advertisements which, as far as known, did not consciously follow motivation-research recommendations. The independent variable is a content analysis of advertisements made by the writer, using as criteria the appeals recommended by motivation research. The dependent variable is a measure of these advertisements' attention value constructed from Starch readership reports.¹

THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

The first content analyses were made of laundry-soap and household-cleanser advertisements appearing in *Good Housekeeping* magazine, December, 1953, through November, 1955. The motivational criteria were supplied from a study by Social Research, Inc.² In sum-

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¹ Daniel Starch and Staff, Mamaroneck, N.Y.

mary, this study pointed out that laundry and cleaning are areas considered by women potentially an overwhelming task and emotionally easily fraught with negative feelings. Twenty per cent of the women regard cleaning as a goal within itself, 15 per cent as a remote goal, and 65 per cent as a practical, sometimes rewarding, task. The study is based on a sample of 250 women in the Chicago Metropolitan Area; 71 per cent are in the age group twenty-five to forty-five, and 72 per cent are in the middle majority social class (upper-lower and lower-middle classes). The middle majority characteristically comprises two-thirds of the population.

The study made the following recommendations for soap advertising:

A. *Product themes*

1. Don't rely on technical motives.
2. Make the properties of the product intriguing.

B. *Use themes*

1. Do not belabor the familiar in the same old way.
2. Give a positive promise, present it ingeniously—supported by appeals to other motives.

C. *Personal satisfaction themes*

1. Do not show cliché women.
2. Indicate the product is for real women.
3. Do not deny the reality of the housewife's problems.

D. *Interpersonal satisfaction themes*

1. Do not contribute to feelings of isolation—highly circumscribed focus on the product without reference to others.
2. Broaden the housewife's scope—imply that household performance has a wider meaning.

² Social Research, Inc., Chicago, Illinois, "Study of Motivations Relating to Soaps and Detergents," done for the *Chicago Tribune*, August, 1953.

The original *Good Housekeeping* ads consisted of sixty soap and cleanser ads of nine different brands that were one-page, non-preferred-position ads (extra-cost second-, third-, and fourth-cover positions not included). Each ad was analyzed for the motivational recommendations, limiting the analysis to the readily noticeable features of each ad, that is, illustrations, headlines, and copy set in greater than 18-point type.

For the content analysis each ad was given a +1 for each positive motivational factor and a -1 for each "Do not." Questionable factors were scored 0 (zero). Each ad was rated twice, the writer proceeding from opposite ends of the list each time. This was done to cancel any systematic shifts in judgment. All similar ads of each brand were then grouped, and ratings were checked for consistency. Plus and minus were considered as canceling factors.

Ratings were made in the following manner:

The ad shows a box of detergent inside a new automatic washer. The installation man is pointing to the product, and a five-year-old girl is calling it to the attention of her mother.

<i>Product</i>	= 0—neither technical nor intriguing.
<i>Use</i>	= -1—same old promise of cleaner clothes.
<i>Personal</i>	= +1—real people.
<i>Interpersonal</i>	= -1— isolation by defining and limiting the activity.
<i>Total</i>	= -1 (minus one).

The ad shows a sparkling sink, a can of cleanser, and the face of a typical wide-eyed model.

<i>Product</i>	= -1—technical motif—bleach.
<i>Use</i>	= -1—same old theme—whiter and cleaner.
<i>Personal</i>	= -1— cliché model.
<i>Interpersonal</i>	= -1—highly circumscribed focus on the product and immediate results.
<i>Total</i>	= -4 (minus four).

Although an ad could have scored from a negative 4 points to a positive 5 points, the actual range of these sixty ads was from -4 to +2. The gross rating of the sixty ads was a negative 83 points. Of the nine brands, only one had a gross positive score for the two-year period. The low ratings were mainly due to violation of the "personal" and "interpersonal" themes. Almost all had a highly circumscribed focus on the product itself, without relation to other people, and the usual model in the ads was a stereotyped beauty with wide eyes and open mouth. In addition, many brands featured chemical claims for the product—a motivational negative.

The content analysis marks for each ad were translated into a simple rating scale, -4 becoming 1, -3 becoming 2, etc. These ratings comprise the independent variable.

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

An index was constructed from the "Noted" and "Seen Associated" Starch ratings for women on each ad.³ The index is the average of the two ratings, and, in so far as the aided-recall method measures readership, this index should indicate the attention value of the various ads. Starch ratings are taken from a limited non-probability sample, and the aided-recall technique is subject to "confounding" (i.e., people identifying an ad they have not seen due to its similarity to others of the same brand). Nevertheless, the ratings are available, low in cost, and commonly used in spite of limitations of the method.

Recognizing that many other factors besides the motivational appeals would affect the ratings of an ad, the following

³ Respondents are shown an ad in an interview. If they recall seeing it, they are counted as "Noted." If they identify the brand, they are also counted as "Seen Associated."

influences were examined in an effort to minimize or eliminate their effects upon the ratings studied.

The interest of readers among different media brands could affect the ratings, hence no attempt is made to compare them among different magazines. The non-advertising content of the various issues of the same magazine followed a consistent general pattern of features and stories and is not believed to be of measurable influence.

The page position of the ad within the issue showed no definite relationship to ratings, although the highest-rated ads were placed on more low-page numbers than the lowest-rated group. As comparable ads were not run in different parts of the magazine, this factor can be no more than pointed out.

Four of the nine brands of soap ran more than nine ads in the two-year period, and these were examined graphically for both seasonal variation and long-run campaign effects—indication of a trend. There was no indication of either tendency in graphic analysis. Also, as all are well-known brands, it was assumed that the effects of confounding would be approximately equal for all.

Competition within the issue could influence the attention each ad receives. As pages per issue and number of ads one-half page and larger had a very high correlation, the latter was chosen as the measure of competition. Ads that ran in more than one issue were examined. In issues of less than 97 ads, the pattern of ratings was highly irregular. In issues over 112 ads, they declined three to four percentage points on the average. There were no issues in the 97–112-ad class. On this evidence, all ads that ran in issues of over 112 ads were raised three percentage points to try, roughly, to equalize this influence.

These ads were also examined with respect to the direct competition (other soap and cleanser ads) in their issues. Up to five soap ads appeared in some issues, but ratings showed no significant changes. The ten highest-rated ads were equally split between left- and right-hand pages. Some manufacturers showed a definite preference for right-hand pages, but apparently this is based on whim.

No allowance was made for black-and-white and two-color ads versus four-color ads, although the final rankings are somewhat indicative of the value of four colors (this will be discussed later). Approximately 40 per cent of the ads were “bleeds,” and they were widely distributed throughout the ratings. No ad had less than 50 per cent illustration and white space. The high-rated ads in this index all had from 55 to 75 per cent illustration; low-rated ads had both more and less.

The dependent variable, then, is the index built from the Starch ratings with the corrections made for competition and should indicate the attention value for the ads.

THE RESULTS

All ads were ranked according to the independent variable—motivation index—and the results indicate that there is a definite relationship between the attention and motivation indexes that would be hard to explain by chance alone.⁴ Table 1 classifies the sixty ads⁵ according to their motivation index and illustrates the increasing attention index score of each higher class.

Examination of a scatter diagram of the sixty ads showed that Fels Naptha

⁴ Correlation .49—significant at .0005 level.

⁵ The brands represented are: Cheer, Dreft, Duz, Fels Naptha, Rinso, Tide, Bab-O, and S.O.S.

Soap and two cleansers were consistently low in both variables. It was felt that this could indicate a difference between brand preferences beyond the motivational characteristics of the ads. This group also contained the black-and-white and two-color ads.

These three brands were eliminated, and the remaining six brands (forty-one ads), whose dependent variable level was more homogeneous, were plotted on a scatter diagram and a regression line fitted (see Fig. 1).⁶

A further refinement was made by plotting the three brands (Cheer, Dreft, and Tide—thirty-two ads) whose atten-

for (e.g., exact size of illustration, colors used, number of persons in the ad, etc.). Further investigation, no doubt, should consider multiple-regression analyses of these and other possible influencing factors.

TABLE 1

ATTENTION SCORE ACCORDING TO MOTIVATION CLASS, "GOOD HOUSEKEEPING" MAGAZINE, SIXTY SOAP AND CLEANSER ADS

Motivation Content Analysis—All Ads	Average Attention Index	Number of Ads	Number of Brands
Negative score.	23.56	41	8
Neutral score.	28.33	9	2
Positive score.	35.30	10	5

tion scores had an even narrower range. This was done to try further to eliminate basic differences among the brands that are not allowed for in this study. The results are shown in Figure 2.⁷

These results indicate that the motivational characteristics have an effect that is statistically significant to the attention index of these ads. As far as possible, allowances have been made for other variables; however, there is still a large amount of the relationship for which other factors account. There is the possibility that the motivation index is correlated with factors not fully allowed

⁶ Regression line: $Y = 19.59 + 2.76x$; $S_y \cdot x = 7.02$; $S_b = .695$. Correlation: $r = .54$, significant at .0005 level.

⁷ Regression line: $Y = 22.90 + 1.95x$; $S_y \cdot x = 7.15$; $S_b = .853$. Correlation: $r = .38$, significant between .01 and .025 levels.

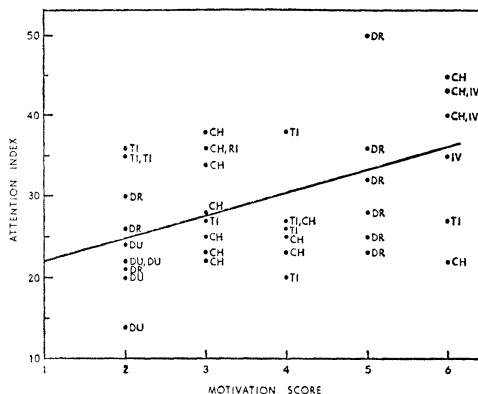


FIG. 1.—Forty-one full-page, four-color soap ads from *Good Housekeeping* (TI=Tide; CH=Cheer; DR=Dreft; DU=Duz; IV=Ivory).

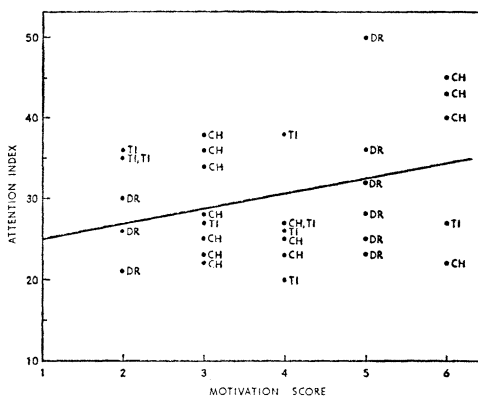


FIG. 2.—Cheer, Dreft, and Tide ads from *Good Housekeeping*.

Figure 2 indicates that the use of each additional motivational factor tends to raise the attention index by an average of 2 per cent. The most consistently high-rated brands, in both variables, embodied appeals that involved other people and made clever use of factors indicating that the products were excellent all-

purpose ones. Realistic family groups were shown and versatility of the product stressed. Low-rated ads used stereotyped models and were narrowly focused on the immediate results of the product's use.

RELIABILITY OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

To test the reliability of this type of content analysis, the writer spent ten minutes explaining to a college instructor in the field of production how the soap ratings were made. Using the list of recommended appeals, etc., this second person then rated fifteen soap ads of assorted brands from the original *Good Housekeeping* universe. His ratings had a correlation of .75 with the writer's original ratings, most differences being in the writer's failure to explain fully the interpretation of the "interpersonal" factors. This second person's ratings of the independent variable of these fifteen ads had a correlation of .43 with the dependent variable—significant at just under the 5 per cent level.

SOME FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Four-color, non-preferred-page soap ads that appeared in the *Woman's Home Companion* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* in the November, 1954, to November, 1955, period were analyzed. The content-analysis ratings of each of these ads was compared to a raw index of their Starch "Noted" and "Seen Associated" rating, as there were not enough ads to learn much of the effects of competition, etc. The relationships shown in Table 2 appeared.

No attempt was made to compare the attention ratings among the three women's service magazines as basic differences in their formats and contents, and perhaps audiences do not lend themselves to direct comparison. Within the

two-year period of the soap analysis no product had more than three advertising campaigns represented. Ads of the same campaign never spanned more than two of the three motivational classes.

A final analysis was made by selecting all four-color, full-page beer ads that appeared in *Collier's* magazine in a three-year period (1951–54). This group comprised eighty-nine ads of five major breweries and the United States Brewers Foundation. An attention index was constructed similar to that of the soap

TABLE 2
ATTENTION SCORE ACCORDING TO
MOTIVATIONAL CLASS

Content Analysis	Average Attention Index	Number of Ads	Number of Brands
<i>Woman's Home Companion</i>			
Negative motivation . .	23.5	4	2
Neutral motivation . . .	33.2	5	3
Positive motivation . . .	38.8	6	1
<i>Ladies' Home Journal</i>			
Negative motivation . .	36.3	7	1
Neutral motivation . . .	41.5	2	1
Positive motivation . . .	44.6	6	4

ads, except Starch "Noted" and "Seen Associated" ratings for both men and women were included. Graphic analysis of these ads showed definite influence of competition, preferred-page, and seasonal variation (readership paralleled beer-drinking season). To limit the effects of these variables, rough corrections similar to the one made on the *Good Housekeeping* soap ads were made to the original index. The eighty-nine ads were then placed in rank order.

The upper and lower quintiles (eighteen ads each) were then content-analyzed according to fifteen positive motivational recommendations from another study by Social Research, Inc.⁸ These

⁸ "Consumer Attitudes towards Beer and Beer Advertising—1951," done for the *Chicago Tribune*.

fifteen recommendations were subdivided into type of appeal, the people pictured, the drink itself, and the settings. Ads in the top quintile used an average of 5.7 of the fifteen possible recommendations, and ads in the bottom quintile used an average of 2.8 of these factors—slightly less than half.

CONCLUSIONS

From this pilot study it is suggested that there is evidence that the application of motivation-research findings can have value for increasing the reader's attention to advertisements. Throughout this paper the assumption has been made that the motivation research was carefully and accurately prepared. Hence, good motivational research may produce new and creative ideas for selling products, show people's purchase motives, and aid in creating greater readership of a specific advertising campaign. The uses of motivation research in the field of marketing are not limited to the design of advertising. This study cannot indi-

cate what would happen if several advertisers in a given product class were to embody the same appeals in their advertising. Most advertisers are familiar with what, for lack of a better name, is usually referred to as "the value of being different." Additional motivation research focused on particular brands could broaden the sphere of the individual manufacturer.

It should also be noted that the motivations of one class of persons with respect to a product may not be the same as those of another class. Even within a given class of persons there may be important variables due to different life-cycle stage, time-of-purchase decision, or person influential in the purchase decision. One cannot assume that there are generic appeals which will attract all people to a product. Although many questions still remain, this paper has demonstrated that the findings of two motivation studies would seem to be predictive of readership of advertisements.